

Environmental Communications Assessment

A framework of analysis for the environmental governance

Emanuele Santi and Lucia Grenna
Operational Communications for Sustainable Development Unit
External Affairs, World Bank
1818 H Street, Washington DC, 20043
Email: esanti@worldbank.org, lgrenna@worldbank.org

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Abstract

This paper describes an environmental communications analysis framework to address environmental governance issues and collect the preliminary information towards the development of a communication strategy. The framework has been developed by the Development Communications Division at the World Bank over years of applied social marketing and strategic communications in the field of environment, and as result of one year of research on the topic of environmental governance and communications. This framework consists of two components: 1) the situation and stakeholder analysis; 2) core communications analysis. The latter looks at (i) the socio-political context; (ii) the possible “sender” of the communication program; (iii) the receiver(s), intended as the group(s) in need of information and whose awareness, attitude or behavior may need to be changed for the environmental initiative to succeed; and finally the (iv) the channels of communications which are most effective in to reach the above groups. This framework is meant to be practical, iterative and requires continual adaptation and inputs to address the specific nature of country contexts, the local communities and individuals and the environmental challenges they are facing.

Introduction

Rapid changes taking place in many societies requires a new definition of the process of governing, which is no longer conducted exclusively by the state, but involves ‘all the activities of social, political and administrative actors that guide, steer, control and/or

manage societies.’ (Kooiman, 1993). Especially on environment matters, the concept of broader participation of stakeholders and more inclusive decision making has been increasingly recognized in many countries both at national and international level, as declared by the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which in its Principle 10, imposes on all human beings the obligation to involve themselves in environmental issues and to participate in decisions relating to the environment¹. More recently², the Aarhus Convention has set new standards for access to information and public participation, providing the public and NGOs in UNECE countries with common standards and tools to monitor performance, and engage in environmental decisions on issues ranging from infrastructure development to nuclear power. The Aarhus convention establishes what may be called “horizontal accountability” across borders by setting common transparency and participation norms and standards (Petkova and Veit, 2000), and clearly transforms the principles of access to information and participation into a legally binding international agreement.

All these principles clearly require an effective use of communication tools. All participatory processes, which are at the heart of the Aarhus convention and at the concept of governance, in fact rely on accurate, consistent and continuous communication that provokes response and encourages debate. Following Habermas’ approach to define the criteria of ‘better decisions’, Dietz (2002) defines a “a good decision as one that: a) makes full use of available information about the facts of the situation and about people’s values; b) allows all those affected by a decision to have a say; c) takes account of the strengths of individual and group information and decision-making; and d) provides individuals and society with a chance to learn from the decisions”.

It is therefore clear that communication becomes essential to provide the needed information, empower and motivate people with the active participation of all stakeholders, understand their incentives, attitudes and knowledge, and address to building consensus. Stakeholders are therefore enabled to get to know each other, discuss challenges and perspectives, identify problems and needs, agree to new objectives

and roles, make transitions towards these ends, be kept up-to-date on progress and problems, and correct course when needed. These tasks depend critically on awareness, trust, coordination and mechanisms for dialogue.

1 Defining environmental governance

‘Governance’ is a concept that originated in the field of International Relations and of Comparative Politics, in order to explain that the governing process involves a broad number and variety of actors in both the national and international arena³. Governance can thus be defined as a governing model that is not produced exclusively by the state, but that involves social, economic, political and administrative actors that guide, steer, control or manage the society. This definition thus assumes that the relationship between state and non-state actors is non-hierarchical and therefore based on mutual dependence (Jachtenfuchs, 1997). An accurate analysis of the governing processes has therefore to take into account the interests and dynamics of non-state agencies such as environmental NGOs, economic actors, quasi-governmental agencies, religious groups, and grass-root groups. The concept of Governance thus recognizes and emphasizes the role of inter-dependence between and among the state agencies and the society groups, and between the public and the private sphere. The increasing influence of this concept on the analysis of social, political and economic development, has in turn influenced how social, economic, and political systems work. In short, as the new model of governance develops, the society and the economic and the political system cease to be run solely from the ‘top-down’ – that is by governments engaged in the traditional business of governing (Baker, 2001). Citizens and civil society are therefore demanding more participation in the decision-making process of public policies, as well as on their implementation and follow-ups. The role that non-state actors have in Governance can be easily understood by a more technical definition of governance as ‘(1) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced, (2) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies, and (3) the respect of

citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them' (Kaufmann, 2003).

The concept of governance is particularly relevant for the environment due to the complexity of its management, which puts demands on policy makers that cut across established administrative boundaries and bureaucratic lines of competence. It also needs to take into account numerous and often conflicting interest groups (for example, business interest associations and environmental NGOs) all seeking to influence and lobby the policy making processes and decisions. Moreover, scientific expertise and understanding are often contested and policy solutions are generally subject to some degrees of uncertainty and short term considerations and interests. The contested results of many government interventions in the past decades have also led to some skepticism about the capacity - and indeed willingness - of public authorities to fully understand and/or address environmental issues. Finally, environmental management is also weakened as different groups, both within a society or across different ones, attach different cultural, economic, and social values to the environment (Baker, 2000).

All these dynamics make the process of reaching consensus or making collective choices difficult. This is also true for the approach to environmental problems, thus calling for a broad dimension of environmental governance, which implies more than the existence of environmental measures and policies. This broad dimension of environmental governance has to include institutionalized arrangements for participatory formulation, development, and implementation of policies. Such institutionalization should recognize the existence and the consideration of policy principles, set of rules, social norms, values, conventions, and practices of different stakeholders (Weale, 2000).

2 Environmental governance as a communication challenge

Environmental governance poses a significant communication challenge. By accepting a broader concept of governance, the number of stakeholders to be reached and be involved

in the decision-making process is wider than ever. Stakeholders are here defined as “individuals or organizations who, directly or indirectly, stand to gain or lose from a given activity or policy”⁴. Each of these stakeholders has a different level of perceptions, knowledge, interests and attitudes towards an environmental issue, and need to be approached in a different way. The communications challenge also relies on the need to fill the comprehension gap between the technical expertise and the understanding of the public and the need to relate environmental solutions to socio-cultural norms and beliefs. Therefore, to address environmental management holistic approach and coordinated actions by several stakeholders are needed, thus requiring good communications and cooperative behaviors (OECD, 1999a).

For these above explained reasons, environmental communications can play a vital role in facilitating the process of environmental management. We define environmental communications as the “planned and strategic use of communication processes and media products to support effective policy making, public participation and project implementation geared towards environmental sustainability (OECD, 1999b)”.

Environmental Communications is also crucial to generating political pressure from the bottom, which is particularly important in developing countries, as it contributes to the reversal of the structural weakness of Environmental Ministries and Agencies and institutions in general. A substantial number of studies show that the enforcement of environmental regulation in developing countries is ineffective as environmental agencies are mostly weak institutions with low bureaucratic status⁵. Many of these are accorded very limited powers in the belief a conflict between environmental protection and economic development, which is the top priority of governments⁶. The existence of strong popular demands for environmental protection can however provide environmental institutions the leverage they need. This is particularly true in countries where democracy is quite developed and government officials take into great considerations public opinions.

However evidence shows that, through a mass mobilization, environmental concerns can expand beyond the confines of the existing bureaucratic structure, despite the fact that formal public participation is not always a regular feature of the policy process⁷.

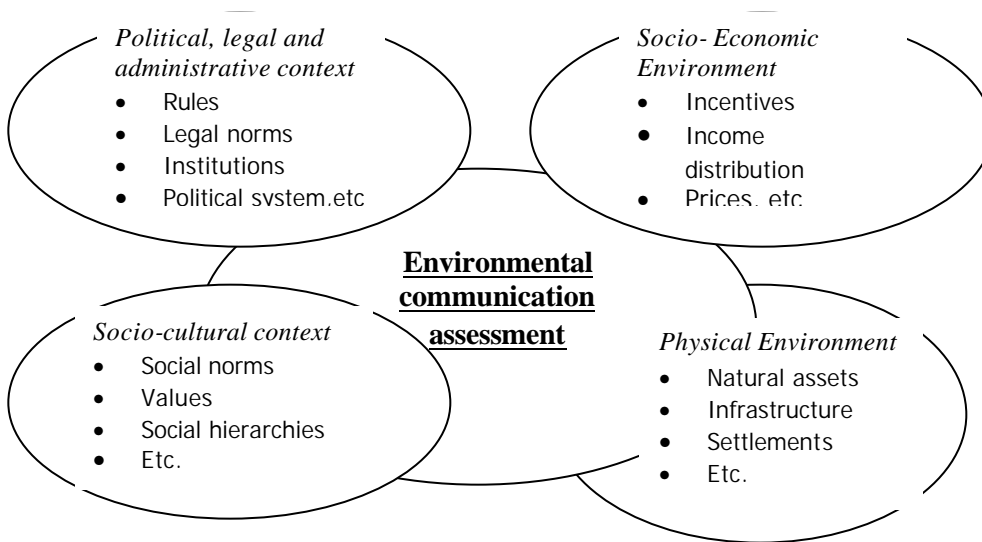
3 Toward a two-step integrated approach for analysis

The analysis of environmental governance is a rather complex one. It has to consider not only the traditional setting of variables of the physical environment and the political, legal and administrative context, but also the set of variables which deal with stakeholders' cultural values, social norms, interests, and socio-economic conditions. Although these variables are deeply interrelated, they are too often considered and analyzed separately.

Indeed, these variables are deeply interrelated and the analysis of behaviors, perceptions and communication issues can build a bridge among them. For instance, the set of values and attitudes influence the appreciation and the importance people attribute to the environmental assets, the enforcement of regulation is deeply linked to the policymakers' ability to integrate a rule into a social norm and change a behavior, decision on changes on the physical environment strongly depend on the policy making and the leverage that different authorities can obtain in these process.

As shown below, the environmental communication assessment looks at these interrelations, as an exercise to better understand the communications processes of the environmental governance and to design a communication program which can address an environmental challenge.

Figure 1: Communications assessment and governance



The above description typically refers to a governance process at country level, where external pressures arising from stakeholders residing outside the country are considered as absent. However the it is widely recognized that environmental issues from a single country may attract the attention from outside actors (international advocacy groups, authorities from neighboring countries sharing an environmental concern, international organizations, etc.), which may originate further pressures in the already complex environmental decision-making process. In case such a pressure is or can be materialized in conjunction with a specific environmental initiative, the environmental communications process should definitively address this additional element.

This environmental communications analysis consists in two steps, the first being a situation and stakeholders analysis and the second being the core communication analysis.

3.1 Situation and stakeholders analysis

Communication assessment should take place after the main problem has been already assessed, analyzed, and an alternative and feasible solution identified. This preliminary analysis forms the basis upon which an environmental program / project, with well-defined environmental objectives, would be designed. In this phase the main communication challenges could be predicted (e.g. gaining consensus about a new regulation or promoting a new practice). In this phase, an initial research is to be performed, by using mainly secondary sources (e.g. Project Documents, Environmental Strategy, Policy notes, etc.), however when a more accurate and direct appraisal of the situation is needed, in-depth surveys, field visits, consultations and interviews with key informers, can take place.

After the situation analysis has been performed and the main challenges have been identified, a preliminary analysis of the stakeholders of the environmental initiative has to be done. The relevant questions to be asked in this phase are:

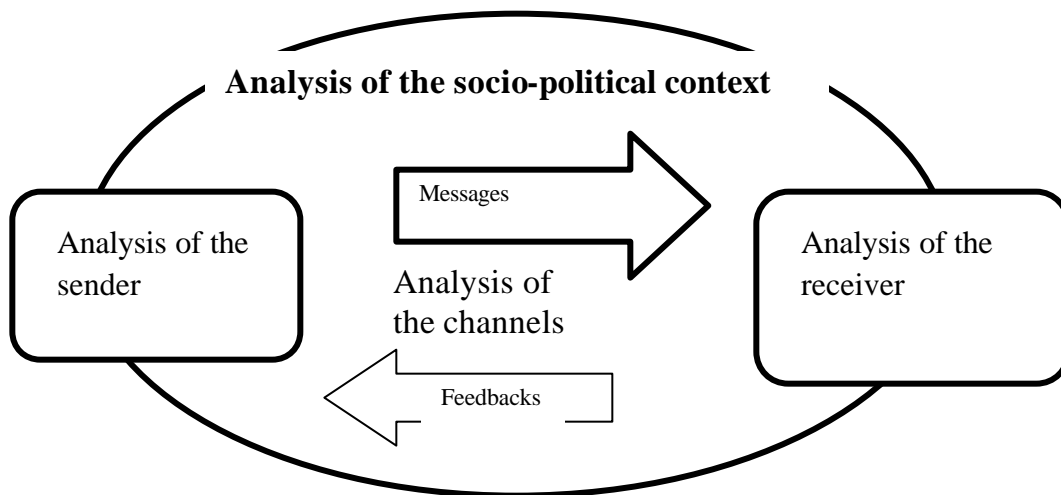
- Who are the primary and secondary stakeholders⁸?
- What is their perception/knowledge/attitude towards the proposed solution?
- What are the main causes for the environmental problem?
- Who are the main responsible for the situations?
- Who is affected the most?
- Who is in a position of influence regarding possible change?

3.2 Core communication analysis

Once the preliminary analysis has been taken place, the next step would be to have a deeper analysis on the governance process of the environmental initiative, focusing on four main aspects: (i) the *Analysis of the socio-political context*, which draws a picture of the country's socio-political setting, paying special attention to the current challenges the country is facing and how they impact and they are communicated to people; (ii) the *Analysis of the sender*, which is defined according to the communication needs

assessment previously carried out and it can be often (but not always) associated with the environmental authority responsible for design and/ or implementing an environmental policy or project and, which may be responsible for communicating the its content; (iii) the *Analysis of the receiver*, which focuses on opinions and beliefs of the groups in need of information and whose awareness, attitude or behavior may need to be changed for the environmental initiative to succeed; and finally the (iv) *Analysis of the channels* provides an overview of the overall media context, looking at formal and informal or traditional forms of communications that stakeholders use to send and receive information, and which can be used for a communication strategy.

Figure 1: A graphic representation of the core Environmental Communication Assessment



3.2.1 Analysis of the socio-political context

The analysis of the socio-political context draws a picture of the country's socio-political setting, by paying special attention to the current political, economic, and social challenges and how they impact and are communicated to the citizens. This analysis allows to have a more accurate understanding of the risks as well as to understand the context where the environmental initiative and environmental communication strategy takes place. The socio-political analysis assessment also provides important elements for understanding the appropriateness and consistency of the communication strategy related with the country's strategic political and economic decisions and developments.

In a nutshell, the analysis of the socio-political context tries to answer the following questions:

- What is the government's level of support and opposition from domestic and foreign pressure groups, political parties, and social sector?
- What are the arguments and strategy of the opponents to the environmental initiative?
- What is the internal support within the government?
- Which are the potential political issues and roadblocks?
- What are the main political incentives for possible allies and champions of the environmental initiative?

3.2.2 Analysis of the sender

The analysis of the sender is often associated to the policy makers and institutions that are responsible to pass and enforce environmental policies and regulations. Indeed, in the broader dimension of governance and of a two-way communications model⁹, the sender can easily become also a receiver. This happens because once stakeholders are empowered and allowed to express their opinions and interests, they send feedback to

the institutional and political system, thus influencing future decisions and/or current implementations of policies.

The analysis of the sender works in two ways. On the one hand, it looks at the division of competences and the interactions between the authorities with environmental competences. On the other hand, this analysis also looks at the institutions' capacity to create decisions and implement policies. Indeed, environmental policymaking is often much more complex and multi-faced than a simple two-way framework. The analysis of the sender therefore has to take into account the analysis of the actors involved in the environmental policymaking, including national agencies, Ministries, regional environmental agencies, environmental departments in other ministries (e.g. Ministry of Infrastructure), parliament committees on environment, and so forth. From a communications standpoint it is therefore crucial to analyze the interactions among and between these various actors and to assess the flow of internal communications among and between them.

Once this analysis is conducted, the following step is to assess the authorities' general communication and public information infrastructure. This is a crucial task as it allows understanding the institutions' capacity to communicate and receive feedbacks for civil society, grass-root associations, and, more in general, citizens. A sample of some of the key questions that need to be addressed is in the Box 1.

Box 1. Assessing the communications capacity of the Environmental authority

Sample of questions

- Is there a Public Relations or Communications Department?
- Is there a communications strategy with clear objectives and target audiences?
- Has the Ministry developed materials and are formats (videos, pamphlets, scripts) suitable and consistent?
- What are communication channels used by the Ministry? Are they adequate?
- What is the degree of openness in its media relations? How does the dialogue with the Ministry develops?
- What are the communications flows with the other ministries (Agriculture, Health, Forestry, etc.)?
- To which extent the input and concerns which are received by the Ministry affect the policy and the environmental initiatives (two-way communications)?
- Are there evidences that the public, businessmen and other authorities have modified their behavior on the basis of the Ministry's communication activities?
- Is there an evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of communication initiatives for each target audience?

Assessing the communication capacity of the Environmental authority as well as of other authorities with deals with environmental matters, provides the base for a clear evaluation of institutions' capacity and therefore also gives the institutional background on which designing capacity building actions.

Box 2 – Case study: Dealing with “multiple senders” in Iran

The environmental communications assessment conducted in Iran in the framework of the Environmental Management Project revealed that the Public Relation Unit of the Department of and the Public Participation Unit Environment had a too separate approaches to communications. This often led to a lack of consistency between institutional communications mainly targeted to key policymakers and media and the outreach programs involving environmental NGOs in the country. The analysis resulted in a concrete suggestion to strengthen the internal dialogue and cooperation between the two departments, and the development of a comprehensive communications strategy, where objectives and messages were agreed upon.

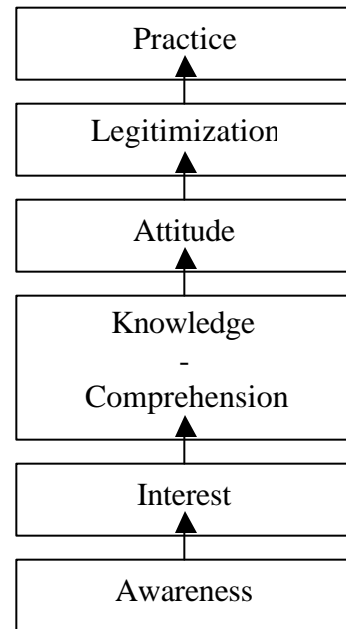
3.2.3 Analysis of the receiver

Once identified the main receivers of a possible communications program, an analysis of the opinions and beliefs of these groups is vital to understand how they can be approached and what messages will resonate to them.

A common myth about environmental behavior is that people do not behave in an appropriate way because they do not know enough about environmental issues, therefore a common strategy is to spread information to raise awareness.

The basic assumption of this approach is that if people are informed that waste pollutes groundwater, that deforestation provokes soil erosion, and that fishing with dynamite

destroys coral reef, they will consequently adopt more environmental friendly behaviors.



Providing information is definitively a useful tool, however it is not enough to change behaviors and to solve environmental problems (USAID, 2000). Ultimately, human behavior is the root cause of most environmental challenges, therefore it also drives any potential solution. It is therefore consequential that many environmental initiative and projects would require behavior change on the part of beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Understanding how people think about a certain issue and the reasons why they behave in a certain way, can pinpoint a problem and therefore identify mitigating measures.

Knowing why people act the way they do and what can be done to encourage people to adopt more environmentally friendly behaviors can make the difference between environmental projects that work and those that do not.

It is therefore key to first assess the level of awareness and knowledge of the groups, and how different groups position themselves in the knowledge-practice scale. Once these positions are understood and the positive behaviors the environmental behavior want to promote are identified, it is key to understand the factors that would limit or facilitate the performance of these behaviors (USAID, 2000). This is a key preliminary step to

understand what communications messages would motivate a change in behavior and what knowledge may be needed to reinforce the change.

Box 3. Case study - Using opinion pools for policymaking – the Environmental Communications Assessment in Slovakia

An environmental communications assessment recently conducted in Slovakia investigated the opinions of the population concerning the environment. According to a public opinion research considered during the assessment¹, in 2002 only 0.7 percent of the Slovak population stated environment as one of the most crucial problems for the country. Historical data show a tremendous decline for this topic in the scale of people's priorities. Unlike 1990, when environmental issues were popular thanks to the strength of the environmental and revolutionary groups, social and economic concerns have overtaken any other distress, due to the high social costs of the economic transformation. In terms of age and level of education, old and less educated people are the least concerned about the environment. These data are key to policymaking and clearly show the communications challenge which lays behind the environmental agenda in the country.

3.2.4 Analysis of the channels

The so-called analysis of the channels looks at the overall media context, and specifically at how the information (mainly on environmental matters) is delivered and through which channels stakeholders receive this information and can be best approached. This analysis looks not only at the electronic and printed media, but also at the traditional channels of communications which are generally used by the so-called "receivers". It also looks at possible actors that have a large influence on the public opinion and that therefore need to be considered and involved in a communication strategy and the feedback mechanisms that are present or could be possibly set up.

Box 4. Case study - Finding alternative means of communications for an effective strategy in Panama

The communications assessment for the Rural Poverty and Natural Resources Management Project led to the conclusion that, despite the advanced level of technology in media production and distribution, the radio was still the key channel of communications to reach the audiences the project was trying to reach and that the project communications strategy should have focused on it. The assessment also found out that local celebrations and fairs (often used also by commercial firms to market their projects) could be key venues for the delivery of environmental messages. An other traditional mean of communications was found to be the story tellers and local theatres which are very influential in some rural areas. Finally, the annual congress of the Kuna indigenous communities was found to be the key venue for an active involvement and information sharing with those communities.

The analysis could also broaden its scope or be complemented by a more general analysis of the freedom and quality of the provision of information, the economic and political interests often driving this information, and the assessment of the present capacity of private sectors and NGOs in the country to carry out communications work

4 Methods

The communications needs assessment involves a series of in-depth-interviews with a variety of key players and observers. Limiting information-gathering efforts to only a single level, type, or class of stakeholders can result to be a large mistake. Too often – especially due to time constraint – these kind of assessments tend to concentrate on high-level officials or prominent leaders. To obtain a more complete picture, the analysis should try to capture views from different stakeholders. The number and variety of stakeholders clearly depend on the environmental initiative and the extent this is affecting different groups. It generally involves interviews with:

- Selected decision makers at both central and local level
- Influential leaders and opinion makers
- Managers of environmental initiative or project
- Representatives of the national, regional, or local media
- Selected representative of civil society organizations
- Sample of project beneficiaries, communities as required¹⁰

Besides these interviews, there are different extra-institutional sources for information, but some of the Government sectors may have additional sources. It is important to choose those sources that best match the needs of the project, the expertise, and the personnel available

The interviews can also be supplemented and followed by in-depth consultation, opinion research or a specific media analysis. These analyses would provide more precise information and baseline data on opinion, beliefs and practices which can be used to help setting specific targets, monitor and evaluate the communications strategy.

Box 5. Case study – Monitoring the effectiveness of a Public Communications Program (PCP) in Nigeria

In the Water Privatization of the project in Nigeria, the project team of the Lagos State Water Corporation (LSWC) developed a series of quality assurance indicators to monitor the effectiveness of the PCP, by designating concrete outcomes, that will become the basis to evaluate the success of the PCP. These are divided into two categories: those tracking the effects of PCP components towards the general public (external), and those tracking the effects of PCP components towards the LSWC staff (internal). For the general public, ongoing public opinion research measures the effectiveness of the PCP. For LSWC staff, levels of awareness, understanding and participation are tracked by recording the number of strikes, the number of legal injunctions, the number of workers participating

Conclusion

Information gathering is an essential component of the governance process and the communications methodology. The environmental communications assessment is a key tool in helping understand the political, social and cultural context of an environmental

project, which are often neglected, and assess the real and potential obstacles to the project success that could be overcome through a strategic communication program. It is also an crucial tool to inform the development of this strategy. It becomes clear that it is important to take into account the knowledge of the experts as well as the knowledge of the stakeholders at several levels, and communication analysis can surely help bridge these different views and understanding. As Chambers said (Chambers, 1983) – “everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects”.

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Endnotes

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- 1 Report of U.N. Conf. On Environment and Development: Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, U.N. GAOR 47th Session., Annex 1, Agenda Item 21, art 10 (declaring that each person shall have access to environmental information and the opportunity to be a part of the decision-making process).
- 2 On June 25, 1998, at the Fourth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in Aarhus, Denmark, 35 European and Central Asian countries and the European Union signed the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) signed the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (also known as the Aarhus Convention). The convention endorses three main “pillars” or component. The first pillar sets rules and requirements for governments at all levels to disclose environmental information to the public. The second pillar sets specific rules for public involvement ranging from public review and consultations for some specific development activities (Article 6) and for public plans, programs and policies like the NEAP (Art. 7), to more limited rights to public involvement for executive regulations and generally applicable legally binding instruments (Art. 8). The third pillar gives individuals and NGOs the ability to seek recourse when public authorities do not comply with the Aarhus obligations (Art. 9).
- 3 See: Rosenau, J.N and Czempiel, E.-O, 1992, eds., Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- 4 Stakeholders are individuals or organizations who, directly or indirectly, stand to gain or lose from a given activity or policy. FAO (2001). SEAGA and Project Cycle Management. FAO, Rome.
- 5 See The World Bank, World Development Report 1992, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992.; Hardoy, J.F., Mitlin, D., and Satterthwaite D., Environmental Problems in Third World Countries, Earthscan Publications Limited, London, 1992; Biswas, A.K. and Agarwala, S.B.C. (eds.), Environmental Impact Assessment for Developing Countries, Butterworth Heinemann Ltd, 1994; Bartone, C., Bernstein, J., Letmann, J. and Eigen, J., Toward Environmental Strategies for Cities: Policy Considerations for Urban Environmental Management in Developing Countries, The World Bank, Washington D.C., 1994
- 6 See Schramm, G. and Warford, J. (eds.) Environmental Management and Economic Development, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1989, Bankoff, G. and Elston, K., Environmental Regulation in Malaysia and Singapore, Asia Paper 2, Western Australia, University of Western Australia Press, 1994.
- 7 See Lo C. W. H. and Leung S. W., Environmental Agency and Public Opinion in Guangzhou: The Limits of a Popular Approach to Environmental Governance, The China Quarterly, 2000, No. 163, 677-704
- 8 Distinction is drawn between primary stakeholders who are directly affected and would include the principal project beneficiaries, secondary stakeholders who are indirectly affected, and key stakeholders who are the agents of change
- 9 See Mefalópulos, P and B. Barros, Introducción a la Comunicación Participativa para el Desarrollo Sostenible, Santa Marta 2002
- 10 See also USAID, Environmental Education and Communication for a Sustainable World, Handbook for International Practitioners, Washington, D.C., 2000 , p.42